

EDUCATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak about the educational needs of our children and about the poor facilities and overcrowding faced by schools in my district and districts all across this great country.

Mr. Speaker, education needs to be our first priority. When I talk to my constituents in Queens and the Bronx, the number-one thing that they ask me is what are you doing about the overcrowded conditions in our schools? The New York City public school system is the largest public school system in our country and proudly sends 62 percent of its students on to 4-year college careers.

□ 1500

This is a strong school system; however, it has two huge problems: aging buildings and a rapidly growing student population. I believe these are problems that plague many other school systems as well throughout our Nation.

Mr. Speaker, the schools need our support. The school systems educate our children, prepare them for college, and in many cases keep them off our streets, safe from harm. But now it is the schools themselves that are posing a threat to the safety of our children. Buildings are failing inspections, and classrooms are so overcrowded that teachers are forced to conduct classes in hallways and other makeshift venues. With these strange learning environments teachers cannot teach as effectively, and our children are the losers.

Every child deserves, every child deserves, a safe school and needs a safe school to have a chance at success in life. We must make it the priority of this House to help our children by helping their school systems with modernization and new school construction.

Mr. Speaker, in my congressional district the school age population is growing. This is extremely evident in the enrollment statistics and projections for the coming years. Queens and the Bronx are the home of many new immigrants to our country, contributing to the ever growing population of our schools. Community School District 24 in Queens is the most overcrowded school district in the New York City public school system. Overcrowding is already severe with School District 24 operating at 5,768 students, 5,768 students above its capacity. It will only grow in the coming decade. By the year 2007, the district will be operating at 18,701 students above capacity.

Mr. Speaker, that is 168 percent over capacity. Congress must and should work to alleviate this problem.

By 2004, high schools in Queens will operate on two shifts and 10-period

days. Other schools in our country and even throughout the rest of New York City will operate on a standard 8-period day. For Queens, that means students will be starting earlier or ending later depending on their shift. Every classroom will be used for classes, eliminating the extracurricular activities that are so important in keeping our kids off the streets. We all know that children involved in after school programs are less likely to be involved with drugs and violence. Because of overcrowding, children in Queens, the Bronx are having valuable after-school programs taken away from them.

The condition of the schools in the Bronx and Queens epitomize the problems faced by schools throughout our Nation. The average age of a school in New York City is 55 years old, and one school in five is over 75 years old. These schools were not fit to educate our children 30 years ago, they were not fit 10 years ago, and they certainly are not fit for today. In fact, today 33 schools in the Bronx, part of my district, need exterior and interior repairs to bring them from substandard up to fair conditions. That is right; I did not say good conditions, I said fair conditions. These schools failed New York school facilities' engineering survey in New York's recently released 5-year capital plan. School facility engineers listed repairs for each school needed to bring them up to code.

Now I wondered what types of things would be needed in order to fail a school. I knew it had to be something bad, but I was not prepared with the actual results. In Queens, 12 schools need new toilet fixtures for student toilets. Children in these schools simply do not have adequate facilities. But that is no so bad when you look at the problems that their peers are facing in the Bronx. Three intermediate schools in the Bronx, IS 125, IS 131 and IS 192 along with one elementary school, PS 140, need repairs to their fire alarm systems. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are sending these children to schools every day in the Bronx where they need to repair or replace their fire alarm systems.

There are so many projects, Mr. Speaker. Five schools need new roofs, 37 schools need structural repairs, including supportive retaining walls, sidewalks, re-paved black tops. Thirty-five schools need pairs or re-modernization to their heating systems, and 32 schools need pairs and upgrades to the security systems, and I am not talking about expensive alarm systems, but fencing, new windows and exterior lighting.

Then there are the projects I consider quality of life projects. These are things that each student needs to become well rounded. Nearly every elementary and intermediate school in my district, 53 in all, need upgrades to their auditoriums. School plays are as American as apple pie, and why should these students go without them?

Additionally, 6 schools need gymnasium upgrades, and 10 schools need

playgrounds, reevaluations and in some cases, construction. Inner city children face the greatest difficulty with participating in sports and recreational activities. I am sure many of you share the image of children jumping rope on black top. Mr. Speaker, that black top is cracked and desperately needs repaving; that is, if there is any black top left to re-pave.

One result of the extreme overcrowding has been the construction of temporary classrooms, which are trailers or hastily constructed annexes usually placed in school yards or grounds where once school yards were. In fact, the school yard I played in as a boy no longer exists. It has been replaced by temporary classrooms, and they are now building a new annex to that school on the former playground. Then there are physical education classes, a requirement for graduation from high school in New York State, being conducted in hallways. We need to make our schools safe and less crowded, but we also have to restore a quality of life to the education of our students as well.

I used these examples from my district, the 7th Congressional District of New York, comprising parts of Queens and the Bronx in New York City, to illustrate the types of problems faced by schools across our Nation. Whether it be rural, suburban or inner city schools, our schools need help.

Mr. Speaker, our children need help. We need a major school modernization initiative, a program that will provide significant help to local school districts and States in meeting their needs both to build new classrooms in order to keep up with the rapidly growing school enrollments and to renovate and to modernize their existing facilities.

I and many of my fellow Democrats support the Rangel initiative which provides Federal tax credits to pay interest on \$25 billion in bonds to build and renovate public schools. This new initiative would have a dramatic impact on helping school districts and States across their unmet construction and modernization needs. We estimate that these Federal tax credits will help local districts renovate or build approximately 6,000 schools across our Nation.

Another democratic initiative is being offered by my colleague from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE). The Etheridge School Construction Act would provide \$7.2 billion in school construction bonds targeted to fastest growing States. Mr. ETHERIDGE's bill and the Rangel initiative will particularly help schools facing enrollment explosion like mine in New York City.

I mentioned before the overcrowding in my district and want to illustrate how much these democratic initiatives would help the City of New York and particularly the Borough of Queens. The 5-year capital plan released by the New York Board of Education states that 75,600 new classroom seats are

needed citywide in the next 5 years. Of those, 54 percent are needed in the Borough of Queens alone. Simply put, out of the five boroughs of New York, one, my home Borough of Queens, comprises more than half of the new construction projects needed in our city. In Queens alone, 36 new schools are scheduled to be constructed in the next 5 years, the maximum feasible according to the city of New York. Unfortunately, this still leaves us 60,000 seats short by the year 2007. We will be 60,000 seats short even after we build 36 new schools and after we fully implement 10-period, two-shift days.

These new schools cost money. New York City's Board of Education estimates that \$11 billion is needed to reach 5 year facility and technology goals. Yes, I said \$11 billion to bring our schools to fair condition and to give our children less crowded schools.

This is not about whether the Federal Government should be involved in education, and it is not about equity for all cities and states. Mr. Speaker, the youth of our Nation should not be penalized for a population boom in their region, and our States and localities should not be criticized for not contributing their fair share. The City of New York is spending over \$6 billion on school construction, and the State of New York, which needs the support of its legislature, is hoping to contribute approximately \$2.4 billion, but they desperately need help, as do many towns and cities across America.

It is our duty to help our students, to help them by providing Federal tax credits to pay interest on bonds in order to help school districts and States meet their construction and modernization needs. Above all, we need to put our children first, Mr. Speaker. They are our future, and I, for one, will do everything possible to ensure that every child in New York City, New York State and in the United States has a seat in a classroom and a safe learning environment.

Mr. Speaker, I yield now to the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER).

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman. I thank him for his leadership in sponsoring this time so we can talk about the needs of our nation's schools. The gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) just talked about New York City. I am going to bring this 3,000 miles west to talk about San Diego, California, and the situation is very much as the gentleman described in my hometown.

By the way, I went to school, graduated 40 years ago in I think a school in the gentleman's district, Forest Hills High School, just out, but I am sure that is a school that needs just the kind of thing. It was a great school 40 years ago, it is still there, it has probably more than 5,000 students in it, and it needs help.

Mr. CROWLEY. A great school; as well as the gentleman knows, also the school that graduated Paul Simon, the famous musician. Art Garfunkel as well.

Mr. FILNER. We had Simon and Garfunkel a year ahead of us in school.

I am the former President of the San Diego Board of Education, and I know how we have to make our children's education a top priority for all of us. Quality education demands that we provide our teachers and students with classrooms and school buildings that are not falling down around them. In my home town of San Diego, in the towns I represent, Chula Vista and National City, California, the needs are becoming almost overwhelming. The San Diego Unified School District, which is about the sixth biggest school district in the nation, serves 140,000 children, and we are growing at almost 2 percent a year. Willing to do their part, as the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) suggested in New York, the citizens of San Diego recently voted last year a \$1.5 billion school bond, and they did that by over 75 percent of the vote. That is an incredible support to show that people are willing to use their own tax dollars for their top priority, their children. But our needs are almost 4 billion by the year 2,013. That is another 2½ billion have to be found. Twenty new elementary schools, two new middle schools, four new senior high schools have to be built by the year 2013.

Further south in my district, the Sweetwater Union High School District, serves 33,000 students in grades 7 to 12. They need \$240 million worth of modernization. They, too, will have a bond issue on the ballot next year, and I am sure our population will support it. But most of the schools are more than 30 years old, five were built 50 years ago, two-thirds of them now accommodate more than twice the number that they were originally built for. We are running out of room in San Diego, in National City and Chula Vista just as you described in New York City.

Like trying to maintain a car with 100,000 miles or more, the job of maintaining our schools is increasingly difficult. Let me mention two specific examples, just to bring this home. At Castle Park High School frequent sewer back ups, water leaks and broken pipes disrupt the school routine. The wobbly, 35-year-old gym bleachers need to be replaced. Crumbling steps and walkways pose danger because chunks of aging cement are missing and tree roots have ripped up concrete. Old classrooms have been converted into science labs, but they lack adequate lab facilities, and hands-on experiments are severely limited. Ten temporary classrooms have no rest rooms or drinking fountains because the existing sewer lines cannot handle the demand.

Hilltop Middle School was built in the 1950s. Its campus has deteriorated to the point where routine maintenance and replacement efforts have only minimal impact. The teachers have memorized the circuit breaker locations, Mr. Speaker, because class-

rooms regularly blow fuses from electrical overhead when lights, and overhead projectors and computers are used simultaneously.

□ 1515

Students cannot shower following their physical education classes because of the antiquated plumbing system which cannot produce hot water. Long lines to restroom facilities are a daily routine because the school has only one set of boys' and one set of girls' bathrooms for 1,250 students.

How can our students develop in this computer age if the wiring and electrical supply to their schools cannot handle the computers?

Physical education should be an integral part of healthy students's lives but how can we expect our kids to exercise and then sit in sweaty clothes and bodies for the rest of the day because there are no showers to use?

I know we have heard of the broken window theory as it applies to our community. That is when a window breaks and is fixed the neighborhood maintains its quality. The message is sent that someone cares. Opposite, when a window breaks and it is not fixed the message is just the opposite. We do not care as a community, and soon another is broken and another and still another. Deterioration of the area then leads to graffiti, gangs, drugs and crimes. We know that routine.

We are sending the wrong message to our kids. With dilapidated and overcrowded schools, we are telling them education is not important. What a disservice to our young people.

So let us join with the President, let us join with the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) today, let us join with our colleagues from all over the Nation in support of the school reconstruction funding proposed in the families first agenda.

We at the Federal level must do our part in supporting the efforts of local school districts and our States. Congress should pass the school reconstruction and modernization legislation as soon as possible.

I thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) for his leadership here. I also thank the gentlemen from Massachusetts and North Carolina and Oregon, and I know we are going to hear from the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY).

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY).

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) for putting together this very important special order. He is doing a great job.

Mr. Speaker, I ran for Congress because I believe that our children's education must be the number one priority in our country, and that is why I am on the Committee on Education and the Workforce.

We must prepare all of our children for the high skill, high wage jobs that

will ensure America's leadership in the next century in the entire world market, and at the same time ensure that our children have a good place in the workforce. We also can prevent dependency on welfare here at home.

Last year, Congress agreed that small classes are crucial to good learning. We passed the President's class size reduction program to help schools so that they can recruit, train and hire qualified teachers so they will reduce the class size to an average of 18 students in grades 1 through 3. We did this because current research findings prove what parents have known all along what teachers have been telling us for years, is that kids who are in smaller classes learn better, especially in the lower grades.

Now we must go the next step, and we must pass the President's school modernization and construction initiative.

Children, even in small classes, cannot learn in trailers or in old school buildings that are crumbling around them. We cannot expect our children to get a first class education if they are being educated in second and third class school buildings.

We know that America's schools are overcrowded and that they are wearing out. In its report, School Facilities, Condition of America's Schools, the GSA estimated that billions of dollars are needed to upgrade school buildings all across America. About 60 percent of all American schools need at least one major repair or replacement.

My home State, California, leads the Nation in projected student growth. It is estimated that overall school enrollment in California will increase by 15 percent by the year 2008. This is not even 10 years from now. More than 30,000 additional classrooms will be needed to accommodate this growth. It is expected to cost more than \$4 billion to construct enough schools and school rooms to meet this need, and this amount does not include the cost of repairs that will be needed for existing schools.

How will communities in California and communities across the Nation be able to finance these school improvements? If Congress approves President Clinton's schools construction modernization tax incentive, schools will be able to take advantage of interest-free bonds to build or modernize what is needed for their expansion and their continued education.

The President's proposal will provide 15 years, 15 years, of interest rate subsidies for school construction. That will come through bonds that are issued over the next 2 years. It is time to show all of our children that their school is equally as important as a shopping mall or a prison. If we do this, our children will know that they are our top priority. Let us put our money where our mouth is. Let us pass a real school construction initiative and let us do it this year. Remember, although children make up 25 percent of our pop-

ulation, they are 100 percent of the future of this Nation, and their education must be our number one priority.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) for her remarks.

Mr. Speaker, I now yield the floor to the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE).

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) for his leadership in hosting this special order on a very critical issue, not only school construction but school modernization and really the quality of the environment where our children go to school every day.

I appreciate that, and for the other speakers who have been here prior to me today.

I want to sort of be forced to have sort of a dialogue, if we may, because last week I had the privilege of hosting a special order and it is tremendously helpful when other Members can have a dialogue on an issue that is so important to the future of this country.

It is amazing to me many times how we talk so much about an issue, of how it is important it is, and then when it comes time to funding we tend to have a big loss of or lapse of memory, as I say sometimes a big slip between the lip and the hip, when it comes time to fund educational opportunities for our children.

Prior to my coming to the People's House 2 years ago, I had served 8 years as the elected superintendent of schools in the State of North Carolina, a State that is not unlike New York or California or any other State in this country today that is struggling with overcrowded classrooms; making every effort to improve the quality of instruction. North Carolina has been cited as one of those States, by the secretary of education and many others, for some quality things they are doing in the classroom.

Just this past weekend on Friday I went to East Wake High School and had the opportunity to speak to an academic gathering of high school students, all of whom had made straight As.

I hesitate to think how many of this body had made straight As to be here, but 5 percent of that total student body had made straight As and I was pleased to be there. The challenge that they face is substantial, because they are in overcrowded spaces. Every space that should be and is, and some spaces that should not be as classrooms are, used as classrooms. They had six trailers on campus, and we are getting ready to add 3 more, in a county that is struggling to meet their needs.

Just yesterday, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. PRICE) and I were at Wake Forest-Rolesville High School in Wake County, which is part of my district, where we met with the students and heard them talk about the problem of overcrowding. A school that was built for a thousand students now

it has over 1,600 and a substantial number of that student body is now in portable buildings or in trailers. Every space in that building is taken.

Unfortunately, the cafeteria has not been enlarged and neither has the library been enlarged. Neither have the bathrooms been enlarged.

We heard a student talking about the real challenges that they face just with discipline, but what he said was, and I think it is something that is instructive to all of us, he said we have teachers that are called rovers because we are so short in classroom spaces that teachers do not even have a home room and they move from room to room to teach. He said when I want to go get some special attention from my teacher and help, the teacher is not in the classroom. I cannot find the teacher.

Now, that is not unique to my State. It is true all across this country. Wake County, as an example, has added 30,500 students in the past 14 years. It is growing by 29.7 percent, has grown, since 1970. They are adding between 3,500 and 4,500 students each year, depending on how many jobs open in the area.

As I tell folks, this is one of the best areas in the country to find jobs, with a 1.5 percent unemployment. It is amazing when people come there to go to work they tend to want to bring their children with them. We are glad to have that, but it adds pressure to our State and to our communities and we desperately need not only to build new schools but to modernize, as the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) has said, and others have already said today.

Every school almost in my congressional district is growing by about 20 percent since 1990. They are building, they are borrowing money, they are working hard and it is time now that those of us at the Federal level do our fair share and help. I think the President's proposal is important. It helps in those communities that have great needs, but I think we can do more.

I have introduced H.R. 996, which the gentleman has been kind enough to be a cosponsor on with others, and what this will do is reach out to those communities that are growing so rapidly. New York happens to be the fourth fastest growing State in the Nation for new students. It is called the "baby boom echo" because the baby boomers who came out after World War II are now having children and they are coming to school.

We need to remember that those young men and women who came home from World War II decided that there was a need to make sure that schools were there for their children and they put their children through and built the bulk of the schools that we now have. It is now our turn to step up and help that process.

The States are doing a lot. Local unions are doing a lot. We can now help at the Federal level by giving those tax exempt bonds. It does not get in the

way of anything locals are doing because all we are doing is providing the cost of the interest on those bonds. They decide where they are going to build, how they are going to build, and it is totally a local effort.

Not only will it provide school buildings, opportunities for renovations, it is about \$7.2 billion dollars, and let me remind folks who are tuning in that the fastest growing state in this country is the State of California. The second fastest growing State is Texas. The third is Florida. The fourth is New York, and the fifth is my home State of North Carolina and it goes down that list. All across this country we are seeing tremendous growth.

If it were not snowing today, and for those who are tuning in it is snowing mightily here in Washington, D.C., there are about 53 million students in our public schools in this country today, the largest number of students in public schools we have ever had in our history; in my home State, about 1.2 million, and the number is growing at a rapid pace. We need to do our part to help struggling local systems.

We are calling on them to be innovative. We are calling on them to improve academic performance, and they are doing that. We need to help teachers have quality places to teach and children have good places to learn.

I often say to civic clubs, and I say it here again because I think it is so important, I cannot imagine any group in a town that is asking a new business to move in to come in and move to an old rundown warehouse and open up their business and say to them the quality of the facility does not matter, because I have heard people say that about schools; the facilities is not what is important but it is the people who are put in it.

Say that to a local business and see if they will come back and open their business in your town. It is important for the quality of that facility and how it looks, because when I was State superintendent it is amazing how many businesspeople from around the country that do commerce would contact us, would ride into town and look at the buildings and then they would want to know about the quality of construction. It was amazing if they were nice, new buildings. They always assume it is good quality, things are going on; and it is.

It is important to have nice looking facilities and have quality because teachers deserve that, and today when we are having a shortage of teachers, and last year this Congress passed the first installment of 100,000 teachers, we need to finish that this year and keep going.

□ 1530

But we also need to make sure we have a quality place to teach and children have a good place to learn.

I thank the gentleman for putting together this Special Order today. It is important that we continue to talk

with the American people, tell them to write their Congressmen and their Congresswomen and say to them, we need you to act now, we need you to help our local systems, help them meet this great need that we have all across America.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from North Carolina. I don't know if it is appropriate, but I am happy that others are having the same problem we are having in New York; is that right? Is that fair to say?

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, it is true, and I think it is by varying degrees, depending on where one is in the country. In certain parts of the country, there is a tremendous need for renovation and repair of current facilities, not only repairing in terms of repairing the buildings and fixing glass, but we have needs for infrastructure.

We talk about the Internet and computers. A lot of our buildings, they are not even wired to accept them, and many places do not have the land. Other places are growing so rapidly, they need new buildings. So it is a combination. The answer is absolutely yes.

I think it is different between different parts of the country, but it is true all across America. America is one of those great countries where one can travel the world and we say to a child anywhere in America, if you want to go to public schools, you can go. It is a great smorgasbord of opportunity for the future. Step up, enjoy yourself, and take all you will.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from North Carolina.

I now yield the floor to the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. WU).

Mr. WU. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for hosting this Special Order on a very, very important topic.

I recently hosted a series of education town hall meetings in Astoria, McMinnville, Beaverton, St. Helens, and Portland, Oregon. The attendance at these Education Town Halls was absolutely remarkable. Clearly, Oregonians are committed to improving public education. Congress can honor that commitment by providing resources to help Oregonians and all Americans make schools better.

Many school districts share similar problems: Large class size, aging or inadequate facilities, and unfunded or unnecessary Federal mandates. However, the needs of each community differ.

Schools in Beaverton and Hillsboro suffer a crisis of rapid growth, creating classroom overcrowding and exacerbating student discipline problems. Schools there need the resources to expand and maintain school quality. Schools in communities such as Astoria and McMinnville need resources to modernize school buildings and provide students with up-to-date technologic tools.

In Astoria, the most modern elementary school was built in 1927. Some classrooms have only one electric plug

in the entire classroom. This is simply not an adequate environment in which to prepare our children for the 21st century.

To help school districts deliver high-quality K through 12 education, Congress can help by doing 3 simple things: Reduce class size, modernize schools, and decrease Federal mandates.

First, we can help good teachers do their jobs by reducing class sizes in the first through third grades. Experts say that reducing class size in the early grades to an average of 18 per classroom will enable students to get the attention they deserve, help teachers attend to students' specific needs, and identify problems early on when they can still be solved.

This is why I am introducing an amendment to the Ed-Flex bill with the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. CLAY) which will reduce class size by hiring 100,000 additional qualified teachers. Last year, Congress passed the first year of this 7-year plan. Unfortunately for our school children, some in Congress say they were only agreeing to a 1-year allocation. Our children deserve each and every year of the class size reduction plan.

Second, we can make it more affordable for local school districts to refurbish old school facilities and construct new buildings to accommodate rapid growth. This Congress should pass legislation to help local school districts afford school construction by paying the interest on local school bonds. That is why I am proud to cosponsor the legislation by the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. ETHERIDGE) who was just here. The legislation will leverage approximately \$5 billion of Federal money into \$26 billion available to local school districts for construction and repair.

Finally, we can lift burdensome Federal regulations to provide local schools flexibility and the opportunity for innovation. That is why I am a cosponsor of the Ed-Flex bill. We will begin discussion of Ed-Flex on this House floor tomorrow morning.

Ed-Flex will give States real flexibility so school districts can fashion solutions appropriate to the communities they serve and avoid a "Washington knows best" mentality. My State, Oregon, pioneered the Ed-Flex concept 4 years ago, the first of 12 States nationwide to be granted Ed-Flex status. Through Ed-Flex, all States will have the freedom to improve school performance and accountability.

The agenda ahead is clear: Reduce class size, rebuild and modernize schools, and give local communities the freedom to implement effective school reform. It will take a real commitment by Congress and the full energy and passion of every parent, teacher, and student in Oregon and across the Nation. We must work hard to meet the challenge, and I thank the gentleman from New York for hosting this important Special Order.

Mr. CROWLEY. I thank my fellow freshman, the gentleman from Oregon.

I will also note that it is coast-to-coast, this issue. From Astoria, Queens to Astoria, Oregon, we have a similar problem.

Mr. WU. As an aspiration, it is not just bicoastal, it is bipartisan.

Mr. CROWLEY. Bipartisan.

Mr. Speaker, I now yield the floor to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ).

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand here today.

The only rights our youngsters have, the only privileges they have are those rights and privileges we as adults choose to give them. We have no greater calling than to provide the very best for our children. Our children rely on us, not only for building bridges and roads, but also to invest in the needs of our public schools. Through our public school systems, we provide these needs that ensure our children are able to learn, live and succeed in a safe educational environment.

Last year, we helped our children by hiring more teachers and reducing our class sizes. Now, our teachers will be able to focus on the basics such as reading and writing at early ages. So we have taken the initial steps, but we need to do more, and we can do more.

We all know that the environment where our children learn plays a direct role in education and has a direct impact on how they are educated. We want our children to succeed in a modern economy. We must provide them with the classrooms, the facilities that will enable them to succeed in the 21st century.

At the beginning of this school year, I visited Burbank High School in San Antonio, Texas to survey the conditions of the school and how we expected our students and teachers to function on a daily basis. Although I was surprised by the conditions of the school that was built in the 1930s, I was not shocked that Burbank is just one of more than over 4,000 schools in Texas that are in need of repair and necessary upgrades.

Burbank High School suffered from traditional maintenance problems, such as the need for new electrical outlets, and if anyone lives in an older home, they recognize the fact that we are not able to put in any of the new types of appliances unless we upgrade the system in our homes. Our schools are in the same condition.

We also recognize the importance that beyond immediate electrical outlets and those kinds of things, old radiators for heating, and especially now when we see the snow and the cold out there, that there are some areas that have needs of both having air-conditioning and heating that is important for our kids.

We also recognize the importance of new modern facilities. Burbank High School was built at a time before the Internet, at a time before cable television, at a time before modern air-conditioning. Nearly one-third of the schools nationwide fit this same pro-

file, which means our children are not being taught in the environment that will prepare them for the 21st century.

The school construction proposal that the Democrats proposed last year was and is the only solution to problems that schools such as Burbank High School experience at this point in time. Last year, the majority party of the House of Representatives missed the opportunity to provide bricks and mortar for our schools, and instead opted for a proposal such as block grants and vouchers that erode our public school system. We must help our crumbling schools by helping States and local school districts afford this cost of modernizing our buildings as quickly as possible and not come up with proposals but prove only to hamper our existing situation. The new Congress we hope will afford us the opportunity to do the right thing and put some additional monies in construction.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to add that a lot of people do not recognize what one of the largest populations, the baby boomers in the 1950s, the individuals that fought in World War II and in Korea recognize, and that is that they were there to make sure that those youngsters which are ourselves, at least myself, and I am a baby boomer, to make sure that we were provided with that access to education. As we turn this century, we have what we call the baby echo, the youngsters of the baby boomers, our kids. We want to make sure we stand up to the plate to make sure we provide them with the adequate resources that are needed so that they can compete in the 21st century. It is not only important for them, but it is important for us as a country.

Again, I will close by indicating to my colleagues that the only rights and privileges our youngsters have are those rights and opportunities that we as adults provide them with. Let us stand up to the plate and make sure that we pass this proposal through.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, I yield to my colleague, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. RUSH).

Mr. RUSH. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY), my friend, for hosting this Special Order. It is so important to the Nation's children.

Mr. Speaker, far too many of America's schools are old and dilapidated. They are falling apart at the seams, placing our children in an environment that makes teaching and learning incredibly challenging.

Such nearly impossible challenges are faced by the faculty and the students of the Fisk Elementary School located in the first congressional district of Illinois. This school was built in 1905, long before the age of educational technology. The last time Fisk saw some capital improvements was in the early 1960s, and since that time, it has experienced no other improvements.

A simple walk around that school makes the case abundantly clear. In

the large 4-story building, there are no elevators, there are no lockers. Students and teachers are forced to walk up and down stairs all day long, carrying heavy books strapped to their backs and carrying their coats on their arms. The student population, which has swelled to almost 600 students, must share the very few bathrooms that are located on every other floor in this old dilapidated building. The gymnasium also serves as the lunch room and as an assembly hall, thereby causing a major logistical nightmare for those faculty Members who want to plan special activities and special programs for the students.

□ 1545

The antiquated structure poses various problems as they begin to contemplate wiring for computers and Internet service. Far too often, students must suffer in uncomfortable classrooms, too hot in the summertime because the windows do not open, or too cold in the wintertime because the windows do not close.

Unfortunately, Fisk Elementary is a mere example of an alarming number of facilities in the First Congressional District, in other congressional districts, and in school districts all around this country. Almost one-third of all public schools were built prior to the beginning of World War II in 1939, and are indeed in need of drastic renovation and repair.

At the same time that these dismal conditions exist school enrollments are reaching record heights, and yet students are left to learn in unsatisfactory and even wretched conditions.

Now more than ever an aggressive nationwide school construction and modernization effort must be implemented, quickly and thoroughly. Modernizing the nation's public schools will assist school districts with necessary repairs and renovations, and meet the unprecedented demand for new classrooms equipped with educational technology.

The 600 students of the Fisk Elementary School, and that is only one example, and those students in classrooms all across this country, they are depending on us, they are depending on this Congress, they are depending on this administration. We cannot fail our Nation's future.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. UDALL).

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) for yielding to me to speak on this very important issue of school modernization.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join my colleagues today in calling for school modernization all across this great land of ours. Our Nation's schools are crumbling at an alarming rate, and this is compounded by the dramatic increase in enrollment due to the so-called baby boom echo, the children of baby boomers like mine who are filling our schools all over this country.

Without a fundamental increase in the rate of school construction and modernization, each passing year will bring a school system less worthy of our children. I am visiting every high school in my district in the next year so that I can see firsthand the spaces in which our children are learning and growing.

A couple of weeks ago I visited the high school in Idaho Springs, Colorado, and frankly, I was overwhelmed by what I saw that day. Some classrooms could only be accessed by walking through other classrooms that were already in session. There were spaces that were unusable or completely inadequate for learning, as well as other infrastructure and technology problems.

The citizens in this school district have tried to fix these problems by improving school bond issues, but they are a small community and unable to meet the full responsibility of financing reconstruction or new construction for a new high school. This is a prime example of a school district that needs the kind of aid we are proposing.

There are three initiatives we can take right now to upgrade our public schools. First, we need smaller classes. Simply put, smaller classes produce brighter, better-educated kids. We need to finish the job of hiring 100,000 new teachers in order to reduce class sizes in grades 1 through 3, so we can reduce the number of students in one of these classrooms to 18 or less.

Second, we must provide Federal tax credits to enable States and districts to modernize and renovate public schools, to improve learning conditions, and end overcrowding.

In 1995, the GAO, which is non-partisan, by the way, put out an in-depth study on the state of America's public, elementary, and secondary school facilities. I would say to the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) that the results are staggering. Let me list some of them.

One-third of the Nation's schools need extensive repair or replacement. That is one-third. These schools serve about 14 million of our American children. The schools in urgent need are not just in one category. They are across the spectrum. Thirty-eight percent of these schools are in urban areas, 30 percent are in rural areas, and 29 percent are in suburban areas, so it covers all the American landscape. This backlog of school infrastructure unmet needs totals right now \$112 billion.

On top of this, 58 percent of our schools report unsatisfactory environmental conditions. These problems include things like ventilation, heating, air conditioning, and lighting. Then, in addition, we have the environmental hazards that I alluded to such as asbestos, lead in our water, lead in the paint on the walls, and radon gas in our schools.

According to an audit on behalf of our school districts in Colorado, \$190 million is needed to correct these most

critical safety building problems in my home State.

We might say, why do we need to modernize beyond this particular situation? School enrollments are increasing all over the country. Let me give a couple of facts from Colorado. We are going to have 70,000 new students in the next 5 years in Colorado, and the number is projected to be 120,000 10 years out. One does not have to be a rocket scientist to understand that the demand for our school facilities is going to increase dramatically with these dramatic increases in our student population.

The school construction initiatives we are considering in the Congress will help our school districts build and renovate facilities to keep up with the rapid growth in student population and eliminate these safety hazards. That is why I am proud to cosponsor H.R. 996, the Etheridge School Construction Act of 1999.

Finally, we need to equip and upgrade our existing schools with the technological tools that students are going to need for the 21st century. As our technology continues to play a larger role in our lives, we must make sure that we continue to hook up schools to the Internet, protect the E-Rate discount for schools and libraries, and integrate technology into school curriculum.

Currently, 21 percent of Colorado schools have insufficient computer capacity and 57 percent have inadequate modem lines. That is unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I believe no challenge is greater for our Nation than ensuring that all of our children receive the highest quality education possible. By meeting this challenge, we will give them the gift of opportunity. With opportunity and preparation, our children will be able to live their lives to their fullest potential.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MOORE).

Mr. MOORE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New York for his leadership on the management of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the School Construction Act. The American Society of Civil Engineers has reported that local school buildings represent America's most urgent infrastructure need. In my school district, the schools provide a perfect example of this need.

The Kansas City, Kansas, School District needs \$11.6 million, according to a study, to bring them up to standard: to correct electrical systems that are real problems in these schools, to provide adequate heating and air conditioning, and to replace broken windows.

Federal tax credits would allow States and local school districts to build and renovate local public schools to stop overcrowding, reduce school sizes, class sizes, and foster a positive learning environment. I urge my colleagues to support the School Con-

struction Act. We need to give our children safe and adequate facilities in which to learn. We need to give our children the tools with which to learn.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. LUCAS).

Mr. LUCAS of Kentucky. Mr. Speaker, I express my thanks to the gentleman from New York for allowing me to have this opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, we must ensure that our young people not only have the best teachers and the best resources, but also the best classrooms to meet the challenges of this oncoming 21st century. Children cannot learn if their schools are falling apart. Children cannot learn when they are packed beyond capacity in a classroom. Children cannot learn when they cannot get the individual attention they need.

Kentucky serves about 590,000 students, with over 350 schools in either fair or poor condition, suffering from deterioration and requiring immediate attention. The 1998 Kentucky school facility need assessments indicated there is \$2.4 billion worth of unmet need, including new construction for growth and renovation of existing facilities to address declining infrastructure, life safety upgrades, technology wiring, and handicapped access.

We must provide our local school districts with tax credits to modernize classrooms, to improve the learning environment for students, and to end overcrowding. We owe it to our children, we owe it to our future.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Kentucky, and I yield to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. BAIRD).

Mr. BAIRD. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

Mr. Speaker, every day when we address people in this body, we are surrounded by young people who look down on us from above and ask what we are going to do for this educational system of this country. I would like for them to look up to us, look up to us because we have done the right thing. We have supported education, not just through our rhetoric but through our actions. We have supported education by building schools that this Nation can be proud of and in which young people can learn and learn with dignity.

I have come from an area where we have some of the fastest growing school districts in Washington State. Southwest Washington, home of the Evergreen School District, is experiencing extremely rapid growth. In fact, the growth rate is 4.5 percent a year, which means that in just over 4 years we will have 20 percent growth, up to 26,000 students in that school district.

We have over 320 portable classrooms in this district, portable classrooms, classrooms not designed to last for years and years and not designed to house large numbers of students, but that is what we are using, and it is a disgrace.

I am an original cosponsor of H.R. 996, the School Construction Act, and I encourage my colleagues to support this important legislation. It will help us leverage up to \$7.2 billion in local school construction bonds. It will help solve the problems that we were sent here to solve. It is a good bill. It is the right bill for America. I encourage our colleagues to support it.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GONZALEZ).

Mr. GONZALEZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

Mr. Speaker, as a country, we are in an enviable position. The United States is prospering due to a sound economic policy, low unemployment, and a balanced budget, but we must not rest on these accomplishments. We must build and go forward. We must now address the most important issue facing our country, the need to improve our educational system. We have the opportunity now to invest in our children and in our futures.

Last year we started down the road to improving our public school system by making a commitment to hire 100,000 new teachers at the early grade levels in an effort to reduce class size. This will allow us over the next several years to reduce the national average class size to 18 students. In addition, this will ensure that we are providing a solid foundation in the essential basics during the crucial early years of child development.

What the last Congress did not accomplish we must accomplish in this Congress. Our Nation's schools need to be modernized and, in many cases, rebuilt. As we head towards the 21st century, we cannot allow our children to be forced to learn in dilapidated schools and in crowded temporary facilities.

In my home town of San Antonio, I have visited schools where space is so limited that teachers' offices are in tiny rooms which once served as utility closets. If we are looking for improved results, we must afford the best learning environment for all of our children. We must, in modernizing schools, continue to provide them with the ability to access the Internet, not only as an educational tool but also as a teacher training tool.

In addition, we must establish incentives to recruit and maintain highly qualified teachers, providing increased support through teacher training in specific fields of expertise.

The President, in his State of the Union Address and in his administration's budget, has proposed a comprehensive program to improve our public school system. I believe the administration's educational agenda is headed in the right direction, and I support the President's proposal to provide approximately \$22 billion in interest-free funds for school modernization.

□ 1600

These funds will benefit schools in virtually all of our districts, in some cases rebuilding schools that were built before we very first entered the public school system.

Recently there has been much talk about a global economy. If we as a country and our children as the future leaders of this country are to participate and prosper from that economy, we must stop the erosion of the public school system and work to ensure that the public school system not only improves but thrives as we enter the 21st Century.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Speaker, just in closing, I want to thank my colleagues. We built these schools after World War II to take care of the G.I. men and women who came back after fighting that war. We built them then; we can build them now. I hope we will build them.

DRUG WAR IN THE UNITED STATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. REYNOLDS). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA) is recognized for 30 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to come before the House tonight to talk once again about the drug situation in the United States and the various questions related to drug policy that face the United States Congress.

I had the privilege to be named as the chair of the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources of the House of Representatives, which will be charged with both authorization responsibility as it relates to national drug policy and also oversight of our drug policy for the House of Representatives as we begin to try to fashion a coherent policy for the United States.

It is my privilege tonight to again bring to the attention of my fellow Members of Congress and also the American people the situation we have facing us relating to the ravages of illegal narcotics.

It is interesting that, at this hour, the President of the United States is in Central America, and he is there because 9,000 people died in a natural disaster, Hurricane Mitch. It is rightful that this Nation try to assist those countries in Central America, other allies and friends, neighbors to the south who have seen the ravages of a natural disaster. However, those 9,000 people killed by a natural disaster do not equal those killed in the United States just in 1 year due to the drug abuse problem and illegal narcotics.

Drug abuse killed, last year in 1998, 14,218 Americans at a cost of \$67 billion. These are the ravages of a war on drugs that we have been losing, a man-made disaster that has taken thousands and thousands and thousands of

lives. Just during the time of the Clinton administration, before it expires in its 8 years, over 100,000 Americans will die because of drug-related deaths.

In my area in central Florida, and I brought this little clipping from the newspaper, this headline of the Orlando Sentinel, "Drug deaths top homicides," and this is from the last few weeks of last year, December 23, 1998, the headline disclaiming that, in peaceful central Florida, affluent to good economy, the drug deaths are now topping homicides as a cause of death in our area. That is why I believe this particular problem is so important to me.

It is not just central Florida where we have a problem. A recent DEA report says that close to 4,000 Americans have died in each of the last 3 years from heroin-related overdoses. We are seeing more and more deaths as a result of high purity, high quality heroin that is coming into the United States.

Additional statistics should alarm every Member of Congress and every American. More than 6 percent of the population over 12 years of age, 13.9 million people have used drugs within the past 30 days, according to official estimates. Rates of use remain highest among persons age 16 to 25.

What is so devastating about the headline that I held up, the heroin deaths in my area, the drug-related deaths is, most of these are our young people, young teenagers in many instances who find themselves the victims of deadly drug overdoses. This age group is the most affected by the drugs that we see on the street. In fact, in our young teenagers, an astounding fact in the last 6 years, there has been an 875 percent increase in heroin use by teenagers, young people, again victims of high quality heroin and higher amounts of heroin being imported and transited into this country.

The use of crack cocaine and powder cocaine rose gradually in the 1990s as young people's views of how dangerous they were began to erode. In general, crack use continues to show an upward drift in the lower grades. Again, these are among school children in 1998. And this is another disturbing trend we see again in a very young group of vulnerable Americans.

The combination of low price and high quality has helped drive the number of heroin users in the United States from 600,000 to 810,000 in the past 3 years. This is according to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and this is just a recent release of these statistics. Over 210,000 additional heroin users in the United States in just a short period of time.

The Office of National Drug Control Policy also estimates that 59 percent of the estimated 176 tons of South American cocaine processed in 1998 was smuggled into the United States through Mexico. Mexico, in fact, is the leading smuggler of heroin, methamphetamine, and the base ingredient for methamphetamine, as well as other drugs coming into the United States.